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GOVERNMENT: IT'S BETTER THAN YOU THINK

The annual presentation of the Department of Agriculture awards to those who have made an outstanding contribution to Government is an ideal occasion on which to talk about Government, about how good our Government really is. On the basis of my experience, I long ago concluded that Government is better--far better--than most realize, and I believe it is unfortunate that people generally are not aware of this fact. I am certain the cause of good government would be better served if we found more opportunities--like this one--to emphasize the good, the decent, the constructive aspects of Government.

It is all too seldom that one hears a good word for the Government or for those who work for it. I'm speaking now of Government as a whole, the executive and administrative agencies of which you are a part, the judiciary and the Congress. All are essential parts of the governmental structure set up by our forefathers. They are equal and coordinate, and one cannot be attacked and seriously weakened without affecting the entire structure.

It is not strange that we hear so few good words for Government when nearly every magazine, paper, or book one picks up or broadcast one hears trumpets the latest wrongdoing of Government. Certainly if anyone ever speaks or writes well of Government or politics he rarely makes the headlines or the front page. The Congress, the departments, and agencies can turn in a creditable performance day after day, week in and week out, with never a kind word or a pat on the back for a job well done. Yet let there be one slip, and the roof falls in.

To listen to some, you could well believe that Congress is completely under the control of sinister rightist pressure groups and their well-paid hirelings. From others you could assume that Congress is influenced only by leftist forces

Address by Hon. Clifford R. Hope, of Kansas, at the annual awards ceremony of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Sylvan Theater, Washington Monument Grounds, Washington, D. C., 10:30 a. m., June 1, 1955.

who deliberately seek to wreck the country by wild spending schemes and unsound economic and social reforms. That Congress might have a mind and will of its own escapes attention.

From the comments and criticism which we hear of Federal agencies, one could well get the idea that Government personnel is made up of men and women who work for Government only because they are incapable of finding a job outside of Government. I believe the greatest injustice paid to any group of workers in the country is the Nation's failure to appreciate and think well of the efforts of those who work--and work hard-- for Government.

I believe that our political and governmental institutions are good and I believe this irrespective of the scandals that can be uncovered or the articles that can be written and the speeches given to the contrary. I base my conclusion on 28 years of experience in the Congress and in working with Federal agencies.

But too many people accept the idea that one scandal, one piece of wrongdoing in Government is constructive proof that all is bad. The rotten apple is assumed to have spoiled the entire barrel. Too many believe that inefficiency and corruption in politics and Government is like an iceberg--that the largest part of it is submerged and lurks beneath the water unseen.

I do not believe the analogy is relevant. Instead it seems to me that disclosures of wrongdoing is proof that the processes of Government are working well, that Government cleanses itself. Very little that is corrupt goes undetected. For this reason I believe that the disclosure of wrongdoing should give us greater not lesser faith in the goodness of our governmental institutions.

For proof that Government is better than generally believed one can look to the great bulk of work involving knotty, intricate, complex problems that gets done by Government in a routine way without fuss or fanfare. As we all know, most work of Government gets done well and only a small fraction of the total causes headlines.

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While some seem to believe that the Federal service is staffed with lazy and incompetent personnel those of us who know Government see differently. We know the Government worker as a person who believes in what he is doing, who works hard to do the best job of which he is capable, who is a good citizen, and who contributes fully to the community in which he lives. My conclusion that Government is better than generally realized is based to a great extent on my personal acquaintance with hundreds of Government workers who are dedicated to their jobs and who are a credit to our Government.

I believe that anyone who has an opportunity to see the Federal Government in action will form a favorable opinion of it and its employees. Let me give you an example. Mr. James C. Worthy came to Washington early in the Eisenhower administration to take a position as administrative assistant to the Secretary of Commerce. He left an important position with one of the largest business enterprises in America. Last January when, after rendering eminent service to the Government, he resigned to return to his old company, he made this statement in the course of an address entitled "The Federal Service, Its Problems and Its Future," and I quote, "I shall always be thankful for the friends I have made here, in high positions and low; friends who have made my task easier and my life richer. I have come to have a tremendous respect, not only for the appointive officials of this administration, but for the members of the career service. I hope that as I go back to private life I will be able to help correct some of the mistaken impressions which prevail in certain quarters about the kind of people who work for Government. I can say in all sincerity that for hard work and patient devotion it would be hard to find their equal in any line of endeavor."

It is a tragedy that more people do not realize how good our Government is. I say it is a tragedy, because it keeps us from realizing the extent to which the American dream is coming true. Nearly two centuries ago the Founding Fathers

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established here a Government dedicated to freedom and to the belief in God and the dignity of man. It was their thought that here under freedom and self-government man would achieve his highest being, his highest standard of living, peace and contentment. An essential aspect of the dream was that man would always search for the truth and his basic tools would be freedom of speech and thought. As mankind today looks ahead into the unknown future, its greatest source of courage and hope should be the realization that it has made unparalleled progress toward making this dream come true. American self-government and freedom has been an outstanding success. Self-government has been, in fact, one of our greatest achievements, and we are making more rapid progress than the pessimists want us to believe. I believe it is important to recognize this progress, to recognize how well we have done and to turn deaf ears to the cynics.

And one of the important things we cannot overlook is that this Government, set up 175 years ago for 13 small colonies along the Atlantic seaboard with about 3 million inhabitants, is functioning well today for the mightiest Nation the world has ever known, with 165 million people and with a myriad of problems which could never have been foreseen by the Founding Fathers.

Although I believe government and politics is much better than the critics ever suggest, I must make it clear that I am not opposed to criticism--that is, constructive criticism of things that are wrong and that need correcting. Criticism has been a most essential factor in the progress we have made in government and politics. Instead of less criticism, we need more, providing it is of the right kind.

In our scheme of things the purpose of criticism is to correct and improve--to eliminate the improper so that the good can endure and develop. The purpose of criticism, like free speech, of which it is a part, is to help us as a self-governing free people to find that which we can believe in -- that which we can regard as true.

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Criticism, whether it is of art, of science, or of politics, should serve in the search for truth. Its end is not criticism for the sake of criticism, but truth. To a disturbing extent, however, criticism in this country is losing touch with this purpose. Today criticism too frequently is based on blind obstructionism, out-and-out appeal to emotional prejudice, irrational name calling, and a desire to destroy someone's character just because he happens to disagree, even though it can be out of intelligent disagreement the truth might emerge.

For another thing we have become overly opinionated--too sure what we believe now is the eternal, everlasting truth. The overly opinionated only search for facts and arguments to prove that they are right. So we use the right to criticize to prove that we are right and not as a conscientious means to search out the truth. Said another way, I believe there is a growing tendency to place too much emphasis on proving that we are right rather than in finding what is right.

I think the growing tendency for criticism to generate into irresponsible bombast and smear keeps us from fully realizing all the good there is in our culture and in our Government and political life. Once in a while we should be able to help those who are doing all they can to improve government and its processes with a word of encouragement--a word to the effect that they are making progress and that their work is worthwhile.

For years now serious-minded people have concerned themselves with the Federal Government as an employer. I believe this objective would be helped by placing greater emphasis on the good in government; on the fact that government is good--is better than we think. People--all people--have a basic inner need for believing their work is important and their effort is appreciated.

On this point let me quote again from Mr. Worthy's able and significant address. He said, and I quote, "The Government worker will exert himself to the utmost, if necessary under severe difficulties, if he feels that those in authority

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recognize the importance of what he is doing and are giving him the support he needs. But if the value of his work is questioned--or worse, if he is attacked directly or by implication as an unnecessary burden on the public payroll--he is deprived of the chief incentive he has for diligent, conscientious effort."

What is a better way to raise the morale of government, improve the government service, than to place ever greater emphasis upon the great things government is doing?

You who work for the Government have every reason to be proud of your work and the country has every reason to be proud of you. The giving of these annual awards certainly is a symbol representing the good in government and for this hour at least we can all be certain beyond any shadow of doubt that government is good, is better than most think.

What I have been saying applies to Federal Government service generally. I want to devote the rest of my time to saying something about the men and women who work in the Department of Agriculture. During my more than 28 years in Washington I have been thrown in closer touch with them both here and in the field than with any other group of Government employees and I have come to have for them a feeling not only of respect but admiration.

I presume that there is no department of Government which is any broader in the scope of its activities or which touches the daily life of the people as closely as the Department of Agriculture.

I am sure there is a general feeling on the part of the public that the Department of Agriculture is primarily an agency to help farmers find a solution for their problems, and so it is. But very few realize how much the increased efficiency in agriculture which has been brought about through the Department's activities is reflected in benefits to the public.

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The standard of living of any country depends upon what proportion of its population is needed to produce the necessities of life--food and clothing particularly. In the most backward nations it still requires 80 or 85 percent of the people to produce these bare necessities. Here in America the industry of agriculture has become so efficient that only about 13 percent of our people now live on farms and some of these are engaged in agriculture only part time.

This means that all the rest of our people except those engaged in the transportation and distribution of agricultural commodities are free to produce, transport, and distribute the goods and supplies which add to the amenities of life and enable us to maintain what we call the American standard of living. It has given us all the luxuries and conveniences of modern life like good roads, automobiles, air transportation, radio, television, air conditioning, our far-flung educational system, and our churches with their wide religious and welfare activities.

Let me point out also that in spite of the small number now engaged in agriculture the people of America as a whole are better fed, and better clothed than those of any other nation past or present. More than that such great advances have been made in the preservation, precooking, and improved packaging of food products that I am informed that American housewives spend about one-third as much time in the preparation of foods in the home as was the case only a few years ago.

All of these things to which I have made reference are not due entirely to the work of the Department of Agriculture. They are due in part to the fact that we have farmers who are able and willing and intelligent enough to take advantage of the great discoveries which have been made in agricultural research. They are due in part to merchandization, they are partly due to the progressive work of agricultural distributors and food processors. But all of these activities tie in with the work of the Department of Agriculture and were it not for its activities and

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the leadership which it has furnished, much of what has been done would not have been accomplished. So it is no exaggeration to say that although the Department of Agriculture was set up primarily to deal with the problems of farmers that the general public and the nonfarming population have received greater benefits than farmers from its work and activities.

Yours is a Department of great traditions of which you may well be proud. In the earlier days of its history its scientific and research activities constituted a greater proportion of the Department's work than now. Changes in the structure of agriculture itself, particularly in the fields of marketing and finance have enlarged the activities of the Department beyond the fields of research and education so that they now include such subjects as credit, price stabilization, crop insurance, regulatory matters, and others which are important in these times. All of which means that the Department has been kept up to date as a service institution.

No one can study the early history of this Department without getting a thrill from the work of men like Harvey W. Wiley, Peter Collier, L. O. Howard, Theobald Smith, Charles Warden Stiles, Marion Dorait, William Orton, Seaman A. Knapp, and Clifford Pinchot, to mention only a few of many.

And in passing it should be said that the research work done by some of these men while primarily for the benefit of agriculture brought about some of our greatest advances in general science as well as in the field of medicine. Thus again illustrating the benefits which the public in general has received from the Department of Agriculture.

Yes, there were giants in the early days of the Department and there are giants now in all of its varied fields of activity. Some of them are here today to receive this recognition of the great service which they as public servants have rendered on behalf of a better America and a better world. There are others here

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who have received well merited recognition on previous occasions of this kind and there are others whose outstanding work will bring them here as recipients of these awards in the future.

These awards recognize the achievements of men and women who have rendered outstanding and extraordinary public service. They will serve as an inspiration and an incentive to everyone in the Department for continued efficient and faithful work in the field in which he is engaged. They will bring to light in future years the work of others whose devotion to duty should receive recognition and last but not least, they furnish assurance and call attention to the fact that there is no more honest, loyal, hard working and dedicated group in our Nation than the career employees of the Federal Government.

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